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NOTES AND COMMENTS.

REVOLVER OR SABRE.

THE introduction of gunpowder created a revolution in the art of war which has developed for the military student some interesting and curious facts. Before then, physical strength and endurance were absolute requisites of an accomplished soldier. The great captains of those days, upon every available opportunity, practised their men in such athletic sports as would make them most proficient with the weapons they used. The Roman soldiers during the long period of their military supremacy had for their principal weapon a short heavy sword, with which they rushed into a hand to hand conflict with the enemy. Their athletic training and disciplined valor carried victory with them for hundreds of years and maintained their supremacy in arms, till luxury and dissipation rendered them an easy victim to their more hardy conquerors from the North. Ancient traditions are clung to most persistently in the selection of military weapons. In modern cavalry armament, we find the sabre and lance, a modification of the ancient sword and spear, adhered to with a pertinacity for which it is difficult to account on rational grounds. Let us fancy two soldiers in the mounted service, equally brave, one thoroughly trained to handle the sabre and the other an accomplished revolver shot. Station them one hundred yards apart and let them advance toward each other at any gait, with hostile intent. Can any one for an instant expect but one result—that the man with the sabre shall certainly be destroyed before he can arrive within striking distance of his enemy? Suppose we made the number a thousand; is there any ground to suppose the result would differ materially in illustrating the superiority of the revolver over the sabre? To exemplify this in another form; let us suppose, that a sabre cut over the head, or a thrust through the body, is equal to a wound from a revolver bullet: and for the sake of argument we will allow the man with the sabre, to arrive within ten feet of his enemy with the revolver; we will assume that ten seconds are required for a “sabreur” to successfully carve one man and get within striking distance, about three and a half or four feet, of another. We know that it is a very ordinary feat for a good revolver shot, mounted, to fire five shots in five seconds and hit a mark the size of a man, every time, at a distance of ten feet, and this with his horse at a full run. The reverence with which we cling to arms ancient might make a wise soldier laugh, were its effects not so pernicious, as sometimes, to make a good soldier weep. Our recent civil war developed some excellent cavalry officers on both sides, and in the opinion of many competent judges, General Custer was second to none. For some time previous to 1876 he commanded the Seventh Cavalry in various Indian campaigns. Being full of energy and ambition, it is reason-

able to suppose he trained his troopers with all the judgment and skill derived from his extensive experience. The sabre was the recognized cavalry weapon, and at that time, our cavalry officers gave little or no attention to mounted fire. In 1876 we find a portion of this cavalry, under General Custer, numbering about three hundred of his best troops, engaged with hostile Sioux and Cheyennes.

These Indian warriors had been brought up on horseback and trained from boyhood to use firearms mounted. The battle took place upon an open and gently undulating country near the Little Horn River, and not a single white man was left to clear the mystery which shrouded the details of the engagement. About two years subsequent to this event, the writer became well acquainted with some of the Sioux and Cheyennes engaged in this fight against the Seventh Cavalry, and after much difficulty they were induced to describe the details of the action. Three of these Indians at different times gave their versions of the battle, and their accounts did not vary in material points. They said the Indians charged upon the cavalry, firing their rifles and pistols, and that the action lasted about half an hour. Thirty-five or forty Indians were killed, and they believed most of the casualties were due to the Indians shooting one another, as they attacked the cavalry on both flanks at the same time.

They said that the cavalry horses were so terrified by the yells, shooting and appearance of the warriors that the soldiers had all they could do to keep their seats, that many of them were thrown, and that they did little execution among the savages. It must be remembered that up to this time our cavalry had received little or no training with the revolver, and that the Indians outnumbered the cavalry, three or four to one. Had the latter known how to handle their revolvers, they would have sent many times their own number to the happy hunting ground.

Toward the close of our late unpleasantness the central part of Missouri was infested by a body of men claiming to belong to the Southern Army, under a leader named Bill Anderson. These men had for their sole armament from four to six revolvers each and were mounted upon the best horses the country afforded. For about a week they were camped in a pasture near the house where the writer, then a boy, lived, and we had a number of opportunities to observe their occupation. They spent several hours each day at mounted pistol practice, putting their horses at a full run and shooting at trees or fence posts. Some of them would, at times, vary this practice by taking the bridle reins in their teeth and firing a revolver from each hand. As we remember, their shooting was excellent. A few months later, a body of cavalry, variously estimated at from 200 to 250, were landed by the railroad at Centralia, Mo., to operate against Bill Anderson and his men. The country around this railroad station is an almost perfectly level prairie. This cavalry had proceeded but two or three miles from their landing place when they encountered the enemy. Anderson formed a skirmish line and charged, some of his men taking the bridle reins in their teeth and a revolver in each hand. The affair was soon ended. Of the 200 or 250 men only ten escaped with their lives; the others were laid out over the prairie for a distance of several miles. Anderson lost only five or six men.

So far as we can learn, little progress has been made by the cavalry of European armies in mounted revolver shooting, owing to the fact that they lack a knowledge of the art and that they have too much respect for ancient traditions. The military establishment of our country has reached a much

higher state of efficiency in the use of firearms than that of any other nation.

This is due to the liberal appropriations of Congress for target practice, the knowledge and skill of our officers in revolver and rifle shooting, and the facility with which they impart this most valuable of all military accomplishments to the enlisted men.

For many centuries the theory and practice amongst civilized nations has been to train cavalry to act by the collective shock ; that is, to develop no individuality, but to have them ride boot to boot, in a solid mass with drawn sabres and with an irresistible force, so as to overwhelm all in front of them. With the individuality now to be found in the foot soldier of an ordinary skirmish line, such a mass of cavalry would be destroyed, or rendered useless before they could arrive within two hundred yards of the objective point. The modern cavalry soldier should be trained to the highest degree of individual excellence in the management of his horse and revolver ; he should be armed with a carbine and at least two revolvers, and have the useless, clanking and antiquated sabre consigned to some spot from which it could have no resurrection. The cavalryman should be practised with the revolver till he could fire five shots in four seconds, and be able to hit, two out of three times, an object the size of a man, at a distance of ten yards, with horse at a full run. To one not familiar with revolver shooting this may seem a difficult thing to do, and it may appear to require too high a standard of excellence from the average cavalry soldier, but it must be remembered that revolver shooting is like many other physical accomplishments : it is learned much more rapidly when the instruction is carried on according to some correct system. The exercises of the recruit, while he is learning to ride and handle his horse, should be varied by at least two hours' work each day, devoted to handling and snapping his revolver on foot, so that the correct execution of these exercises may become mechanical ; in other words, the recruit should be trained to bring his pistol to bear upon an object and hit it without any perceptible time being spent in taking aim and pulling the trigger. Ours is an age of specialists, and it is seldom that one is found who can reach the highest degree of excellence in more than one mechanical art. When this skill is once attained in using a revolver, there is ever a good demand for its services, and the confidence and courage which its possession is certain to give to our cavalry soldier will make him brave and self-reliant to an extent which will render him on the field of battle more than a match for five times his number of the best cavalry the old world has ever seen.

W. P. HALL,

Major and Assistant Adjutant-General ; late Captain Fifth
United States Cavalry.

WHAT MEN THINK OF WOMEN'S DRESS.

IF we accept the oldest writings concerning the subject, we must concede that the first costume worn by primitive man and woman was selected only after a consultation of the two sexes. It is a curious fact that after centuries of groping in the blind labyrinths of dress, women are returning in some measure toward primitive ideas and conditions. They are just beginning to appreciate the aid of men in matters of this sort.

The increase of liberty that women enjoy in this latter decade or two, their entrance into the realm of men's occupations, and their consequent